

The thorns of displacement sugarcoated with term ‘development’

From natives to Homeless and Landless, how the native Newa people are being displaced in their homeland.



An old picture of Yén (Picture by: Hira Kazi)

Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, is known as Yén in Nepal Bhasa, like the name its native values and norms have been dying out. Nepal as being in a quest of development is still struggling while Kathmandu is ‘the most developed city’, it is still suffocating even after all the power had been centralized.

Kathmandu is a world in itself as it can be taken in four senses:

1. The ancient town of Kathmandu, i.e. Yén, which is the core area;
2. Kathmandu as Kathmandu Metropolitan City;
3. Kathmandu, a district of Nepal;
4. The Kathmandu Valley, this term came into usage in recent decades while before this, the valley was known as “Nepal Valley”, or “Nepa valley”.

In this article, the term “Kathmandu”, would mean the entire Nepa Valley (also known as the Kathmandu Valley).

The political changes in Nepal have brought many changes in social and economic structure due to which the capital have suffered a lot. In the flow of democracy, the populist politicians came with “narratives of development” in order to gain support and vote from the people. Within the past years, these narratives have been fit into the mind of citizens, that has provided a vision in people on “what development actually means”. Not to be surprised, this is the narrative of development that Western countries promoted after the Second World War and are now probably regretting it. It is the narrative of development that does not prioritize the human aspect, sustainability aspect and fully infrastructural scale. Some people said that they will turn Nepal into Singapore or Switzerland. In this process they forgot the native values of Nepal; they intend to replicate foreign countries. Within the past years, these narratives have become norms into the mind of citizens. The understanding of the concept of development has been corrupted.

Development is ought to have native ingredient in it as the statement goes “system the suits the soil”, development is ought to be sustainable. There has been an effort to preserve the old cultural heritage and to keep the pre-existing community intact. This awareness took a long time for many countries and Nepal should be aware of not learning it late. The development may not be in demolishing and re-constructing but the protecting and planning the pre-existing community.

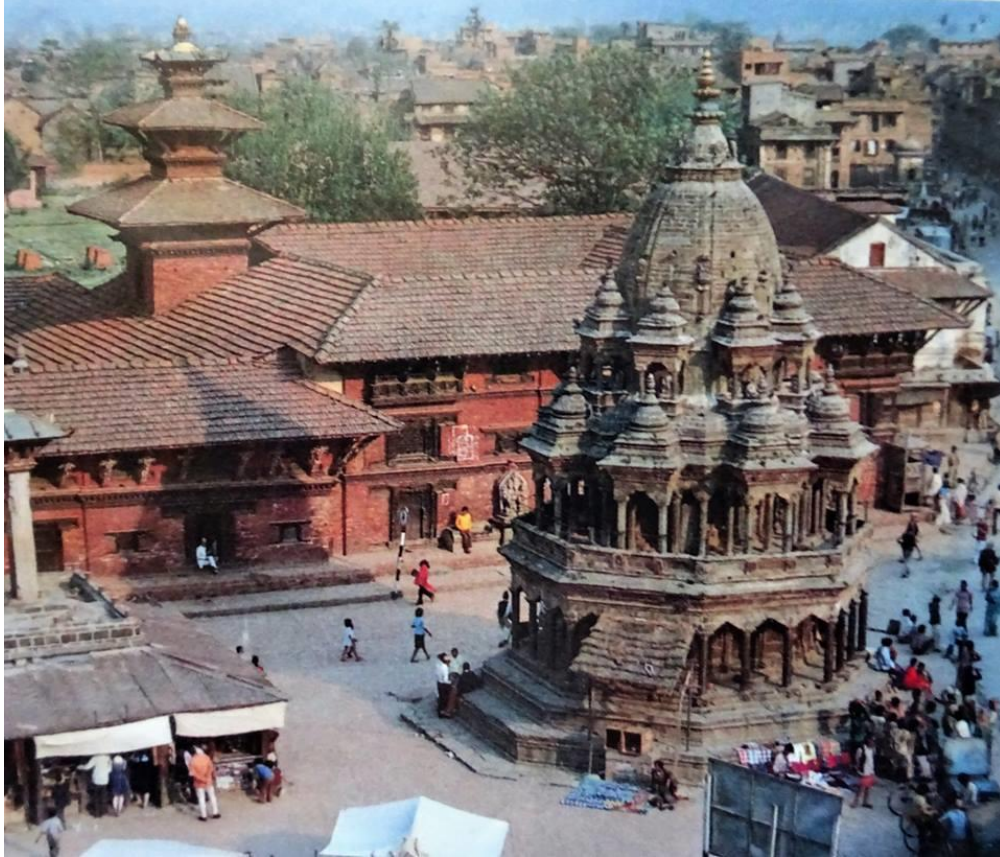
Kathmandu is the capital of Nepal. But, Kathmandu does not rule over the country. With location as a capital, we have privilege in access to facilities. However, the capital was located in Kathmandu inorder to rule Kathmandu. The Gorkhalis, the Ranas and Panchayats and now the ones who step on the land of Kathmandu, but crush the hearts of Kathmanduities. They are the people who have reach in the state, power and bureaucracy. They have reach because of ass

kissing, nepotism and also because of belonging to a same community and speak the language the state uses solely. They corrupt the state, buy land, raise tall buildings in Kathmandu, get the status of “local”, but again make policies, laws and order that push the Kathmanduites.

The native people of Kathmandu, have started to feel that they are being pushed around. The indigenous community had always been a victim of systematic oppression since the conquest by the Gorkhalis. The crime against humanity range from the attempts of genocide as well as effort to eradicate the language by jailing writers contributing to various genre of literature of all languages of minorities, these languages were being barred from government offices. The indigenous population has suffered a long history of an apartheid regime. Newa people have continuously fought regime after regime, only left to be betrayed by one regime after another. Newa people faced series of oppression from the Gorkhali Shah regime, Rana regime to the Panchayat rule. After these decades and centuries of struggle against the oppression, Nepalese consisting of all ethnicity including Newa people were able to establish the republic. With the introduction of Federal Democratic Republican government, Newa people alongside with all other minorities had many expectations and will not be a victimized by the system any further.

Today, Nepal have a constructed a “democratic” constitution. The constitution ensures that everyone has equal rights and no discrimination person or a community shall be a victimized in a systematic way. This may be only limited in books and the in the practice the events may actually look different. We achieved to become a republic, but the bureaucracy is still the same. We talked about “New Nepal”, but our definition of “nationalism” is still holding its values from an autocratic and tyrannical era. The regime which intended to directly eliminate us may have only changed its clothes but not its intents. Our language was banned from everything, writers were jailed, large libraries were burnt, and mass gathering was banned. But, today in the period of democracy, it is not a direct approach, while only the narrative of “development” is used.

The ancient Newa towns



An old picture of Yala. (Photo by: Niels David Williams)

While discussing about Newa people, we find Newa people are different from other ethnic groups with so much diversity and contribution in different genre of art, literature and sciences, Newa community can be called a civilization. Newa Civilization has its notable Pagoda architecture which provide it with a distinct taste and aura. The ancient boundaries of Newa territory is not just the Nepa Valley but a larger area called Nepal Mandala. As Newa people live in urban spaces, these towns which have historical ties with ancient Nepal is also diminishing. Those which has not been encroached, those Newa towns outside the valley is also in the same threat.

While there is a rapid unplanned urbanization crawling in the valley, the territory outside the Kathmandu Valley has turned barren. There are more than fifty Newa towns inside the valley. Newa towns were well planned towns of the ancient period that has its own feature characteristics and its own significance to the people. We can also talk about [The Relevance of Ancient Newa Urban Settlement Patterns to the Global Sustainability Crisis](#) and as well as find out how the [importance of Newa building technology as important indigenous](#)

[knowledge](#). However, the Newa towns are organized towns where there is integration among the people. The ancient Newa towns are organized towns built upon the human scale and of course various aspects of the Newa philosophy.

Development or mis-managed urbanization?



Picture was being circulated in social media with unknown source.

People are still unaware about what exact model of development Nepal follows. But, we can say that this is the same model of development that does not care about humanity, sustainability, environment or other important aspects, rather centralize on infrastructural scale. Within 40 years, how has Kathmandu changed, what progress did Kathmandu do? Nevertheless, the same system, the same bureaucracy, thing that changed drastically is the population size and demography, other aspects did change in a tortoise speed. In old school development studies, the word “development” was referred to an elevated level of economic activity. Tall buildings and wider roads most definitely spark an increase in the level of economic activity, but they do not define development.

Yes, infrastructures such as wider roads that facilitate better mobility inside the city and high-rise buildings that provide crucial commercial and retail space are important to the process of development. But they alone cannot define development. When improved infrastructures such as wider roads and taller buildings contribute in improving people's living standard, we can then say that they are contributing to the development of the city. The key here is not to emphasize only on developing physical infrastructure but also increasing their contribution in bringing positive effect in the lives of the people.

Whose development?



Newa homes demolished at Sanga during Road Expansion.

If I am supposed to leave my land, for some construction, then of course I am supposed to be benefited from it. But whom is this development actually befitting?

Desvetlanocide: intentional action to remove and destroy settlements of indigenous people showing the cause of development.

Development projects are the ones which ameliorate people's living standard; not deteriorate existing one. This is why even the international community is increasingly accepting the Human Development Index (HDI) as a metric to measure development. To move up in the Human Development Index, a country not only needs to pay heed to economic growth (a component to which construction of new infrastructures such as roads, factories, etc., contribute to) but also genuinely improves people's living standard by ensuring quality health, education and environment for its citizens.

Karyabinayak Homes was one project brought by some company, which bought some land from people of Bunga and Khwana. Today around that area, sophisticated buildings have come up. Did it benefit the locals who sold their land? No. The selling was voluntary, seemed voluntary, but of course a company came, persuaded them to sell and sold, for some development projects. The same is happening. If this development project is not going to benefit the people of the place, why should the locals sacrifice for being pushed behind?

The major question is "whose development?". The people of Kathmandu are being in need of sacrificing their land and property for such projects that is not going to benefit them but actually push them even behind. The "selling land" action or "getting compensated" action seems voluntary, but that is persuaded and influenced by providing inadequate information, greed and other measures that do not follow the rule of "Free Prior Informed Consent".

Past experiences with the projects

There are ample experiences and examples of projects that has turned the lives of local people in misery and has had no ample positive effect after its completion. There are many examples where displacement has resulted to degradation in the people's quality life as well as Newa people have been ripped of their culture and social structures.

Lazinpaa (Lazimpat) Road Expansion



Clippings form Youtube Video on Lazimpaa Road Expansion

In 2011, the road of Lazimpat was expanded. Laazin-paa (लाजिंपा:) or Lazimpat is one of the area which has a historical essence, specially with the Newa people. Lazimpat boasts the only road connecting the northern part of the Kathmandu valley with the southern part.

During this road expansion, no locals were prior informed. Free Prior Informed Consent was made a joke. It was hundreds of people who were going to be homeless. I have some cuttings from a news portal Housing Nepal:

The two-storey house that was built of mud, cement and bricks has lost its facade. Now propped up with wooden poles, the crumbling house has only one room left on its second floor, where Laxmi Tuladhar, 53, is living with her little family. The house, with wreckage of its front scattered around, conjures up an image of a bombed houses in war-torn cities. But, in fact, it was bulldozed by the government on June 29 of last year. A bulldozer of Kathmandu Valley Town Development Authority (KVTDA) demolished much of Laxmi's house, which, government authorities blamed was built on public land. Laxmi's family

continues to live in the damaged house. Laxmi resisted the lie of authority. It was not built on public land, but her private land and was built decades ago.



(Clippings from Youtube Video)

The second floor of Laxmi's house has been completely destroyed. On the ground and first floors, almost all rooms have been damaged. On the second floor, there is only one room where Laxmi has stuffed all her belongings.

"There are cracks even on the walls of this room," says Laxmi. "But I have nowhere to go." After their house was bulldozed, Laxmi's oldest son, who is married, moved to his wife's house. Now, only Laxmi and her two sons are living there.

Whenever she recalls the day her house was demolished, Laxmi's eyes well up. Laxmi's house, where she has spent more than two decades, was torn down in front of her own eyes. "I cried for help," she recalls. "But no one stood by my side."



(Clippings from Youtube Video)

This has just been an example of displacement. About hundreds of families got displaced. “I used to see the people of Lazimpat put tents in the street sides and slept in the streets for many months. Their condition was horrible.”, Bhawani Rana, a local living around said.

“First they came and marked certain area of wall encircling our property. I have all the papers evident that not a single inch of public land has been encroached. They do not demolish the whole house at once. They first come and take certain section, then again certain section. This way in the run, we get completely homeless. No one heard us.”, an old man said in Nepal Bhasa with eyes full of tears.

Jala road expansion

Jala (जल), also known as Harisidhhi, is an ancient town in Lalitpur district. In February 2017, a bulldozer suddenly came and started to demolish a house. No information, no nothing, it approached and started to demolish a house suddenly.

The locals started to shout and scream with this sudden arrival of bulldozer. Again was the same excuse of “house built encroaching public land”. None of the locals agreed at all. The house was never built that way, it was fully their private land, inherited from many generations. The locals of Jala know one another and the neighbors have knowledge, since they are not the new comers. An issue was created. The police was so much trying to use force, the locals warned to come out with local weapons if they did not step back.



Images from uninformed demolition of houses in Jala.

When the bulldozer came, two old people were inside the house, unknown. When all of sudden the dozer start to demolish house, the senior citizens 80 years above, sick and were taking oxygen mask, thought it was an earthquake. Trying to escape, they fell down and got injured. The locals made noise and stopped the dozer, then they came to knew it wasn't a natural disaster, but a man made fully planned monster approaching.



The senior citizens of Jala who were inside their house when a dozer all of a sudden started demolishing their house.

Lhuti By-pass Road Expansion

Lhuti(ल्हुति) also known as Balaju, is among another ancient town of Nepal Mandala. A by-pass street was constructed. There were houses in both sides of the by-pass. Road expansion did happen here as well. But shockingly, the same “false claim of public land encroachment” only applied to one row of the houses. Among both sides row of the houses, only one row houses were completely demolished, while the other row was completely untouched. If it was a legal process, only certain part of houses of both rows were to be demolished. But here, neither did any house break the law, nor was the demolishing according to law. It was because a politically powerful person’s house was located in the other row, which was untouched.



Desvestlanocide Road Expansion in Lhuti (Picture: Ram Kumar Shrestha)

Tribhuvan University Construction



Image taken from video documentary by Newa Swayatta Rajya Manka Sangharsha Samiti.

A positive change for education in Nepal and, on the other side, the land where TU was built was fields of natives from Kipoo (Kirtipur). Most of the natives in Kipoo depended on agricultural land. During the period, majority people in Kipoo could only understand Nepal Bhasa and not other languages. The language used by state and government authorities was different, which also caused a problem. After the land was taken, people were given certain assigned money in their bank accounts. Current assets was given instead of fixed assets.

Socio-physiological consequences

Many people have been displaced and become homeless through these road expansion projects. Some people who have been compensated could not buy a new house in Kathmandu and were forced to move some much of rural region. “One of my friend committed suicide due to road expansion. An unemployed person who had only one house, when had to loose it, went to a mental trauma.”, said Suman Saaymi, “We had noticed behavioral changes in him. Later he committed suicide because he was displaced”. Many old people have

moved to old-age homes because the compensated money cannot give them a new house.

The locals have died from heart attack and have gone to mental trauma since their shelter is now vulnerable and they do not know what to do, where to go.

The following link guides you to interview of all displaced people: [The displacement of locals of Nepal Mandala: Kathmandu Valley \(Nepal Bhasa interview\)](#)

Properly undocumented incidents

A lot of such incidents have been properly un-documented but have passed through oral verses. Some of these incidents are noted down.

1. While construction of ringroad, a lot of Newa people lost their land. The ones who were close to the authorities got compensated, but the ones who had less land did not get compensation. People lost their land and economic source. A committee was formed by government to deal on this issue, but nothing happened, and only the papers got piled up. [In a speech by Newa Dey Daboo's president during a program at Jyapu Samaj, Yala]
2. During construction of Swimming Pool at Satdobato, land of natives from Yala was not compensated.[Source from a researcher of Yala]
3. The Master Project to remove Gwola Basti was not completed. Gwola(ग्वला) is the ancient town surrounding Pashupati. For 25 years, Nepal had no "jana pratinidhi" which advantage Pashupati Area Development Trust took and did a lot of crime against heritages. There was a Master Plan to remove the whole ancient town, which probably is in limbo.
4. Too many of Guthi lands have been encroached from state. People have been eye-witness. Yet, it has not been properly documented. Singha Durbar was built on Guthi land, which was grabbed through institutionalized use of force. Chonga Gandedya (चवडा गनेद्यः) in Khwopa was recently grabbed by army. In general, the formation of Guthi Sansthan by the government, has resulted to loss of the land. Many of Guthi land was taken by government and certain hundred rupee was given instead. Guthi Sansthan legally made this community land into private land after many land were passed in names of the head of Guthi. Then the land mafias targeted them.

The further plans

That was not the end. “Destruction and displacement of indigenous people in the name of development. The further plans of government are as follows:

1. Construction of outer ringroad; while environmentalists warn of its health and environmental hazards; adverse affects on last remaining green land and clean air of the valley; shall impact the Newa towns in the corners of valley, in a long run leading to displacement and destruction of towns
2. Road Expansion will take place bisecting a lot of ancient Newa towns. Yes, there is an alternative, but government intends to take four to eight lane highways through the ancient Newa towns that will leave no existence of many of them. Even the Chaityas older than Swayambhu, the heritages, the temples shall be rubble, while people will have no choice but to leave. Almost all the Newa towns of the valley are vulnerable and at high risk of being demolished due to road expansion. In Tokha and many towns, Jatra will have to be halted due to road expansion. Some towns will probably be non-existent in long run
3. Fast Track project from Madhesh to Khona has put the town into more risk. The towns Bunga and Khona of Lalitpur are already at risk due to outer ringroad, while Fast Track adds to more vulnerability. These projects will wipe out the existence of these towns. Refer more to the articles: [Ambitious pride projects threaten Khokana heritage](#), [Fast Track brings fear of displacement to Khokana](#) and a detailed report on the issue [Khokana cultural-archaeological interest sites on large scale construction project routes](#)

Excuse of “illegal house” and legal absurdity

The common excuse Kathmandu Valley Development Authority gives is “houses built against the law” or “houses which have encroached the public land”. This has been a base-less and evidence-less claim while most of the native residents have built their house as per law. The absurdity comes in law. The current law that KVDA formulates was introduced during fascist Panchayat regime, and has not been reviewed even after democracy has come. More

absurdity in their argument comes, when Medieval towns, Medieval heritage sites, temples and public spaces also actually “are built encroaching the land”. The argument is not just base-less, but also an example of systematic suppression against Newa people.

Ironically, involvement of land-mafia and corrupt people has made condition even worse. As soon as a new project comes, the eyes of land mafia concentrates on the area. This involvement of mafia has made the natives suffer even more, and when mafias actually use/lure people from the communities to get involved in mafia works.

Majority people don't know what the legal order has, because government publishes “Raaj patra” (the government gazette) in some non-mainstream newspaper which, most Newa people and even Nepalese in general don't even read. The locals are mostly completely unknown about any projects, until and unless someone in person informs them. But, till the information reaches the locals in person, less time is remained for the project to kick off. Surprisingly, even many of the government persons do not have idea about what is published in ‘Raaj patra’.

The shifting “rules” and the blame of encroaching

“Maapdanda” often used terminology here. There is a rule, while a person needs to build house. The rule is to leave certain meter of space from the street to build a house. I have an experience of Rabin Shakya from Balkumari. While his friend built a house in the new housing section, he had to leave only 4 meters of land. After less than a year, the area was getting packed. When he had to build house in the same place, he was asked to leave more area of land. While he asked the authorities for the rationale, they said, “Before few months, this place was not packed. Now since more houses have increased, you must leave more space.” He had to leave 8 meters. But then, now the people who built houses months ago, actually according to rules left 4 meter space, their houses have become against the rule, according to the new rule. Surprisingly no public knows why, how and when these rules change or shift.

Newa people aren't the ones who encroached public land, the government has systematically encroached our lands. All government agencies in Nepa Valley is built on stolen land.

Use of institutionalized force



Use of institutionalized force at Lazinepaa Road Expansion (*Clippings from Youtube Video*)

The use of force against the civilians for ‘development’ reflects the powerful institutions involved in the exploitation rather the visible, fractured ones. Use of institutionalized force, for any construction project brings a question mark on whether it is development or not!



Militarization of Khona for Fast Track Project

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